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OPTIONS IN INDOCHINA

The Setting

, Our immediate objectives are to secure the return of our POWs and bring the fighting in South Viet-Nam to a halt. Over the longer term we seek to prevent a resumption of the war in Indochina and a resolution of the struggle by political means rather than by force. The leadership in Hanoi, however, is evidently devoting a major effort to rebuild its military potential in South Viet-Nam, obviously as an alternative to the political course provided in the Paris Agreement.

Our major task is to persuade the Politbureau not to resort again to the military option. To this end we must have credible military and political deterrents and at the same time lead Hanoi to perceive benefits for North Viet-Nam on the road to peace.

Our principal assets at the present time include:

- (a) Our military forces in Thailand and at sea off Indochina.
- (b) The strength of the South Vietnamese armed forces and our residual ability to influence the way they are used.
- (c) The evident desire of the Soviet Union, the PRC and the Eastern European countries not

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disturb their relations with the United States.

- (d) Our ability to provide significant material aid for the rehabilitation and development of North Viet-Nam.
- (e) Hanoi's evident desire to have constructive relations with the United States (as an offset to Soviet and Chinese influence).

The major liabilities in the situation from our standpoint include:

- (a) The relatively poor political prospects for the communists in South Viet-Nam under Thieu which may turn them back to the battlefield.
- (b) The large and growing communist military potential in South Viet-Nam.
- (c) The inability of either Laos or Cambodia effectively to prevent communist use of their territories.
- (d) The growing weakness of the Cambodian government.
- (e) The limitations on the use of effective U.S. military force in Indochina.

Courses of Action

I. Diplomatic/Political

A. GVN

in a manner best calculated to end the fighting and lead to political accommodations, if not solutions. We are using our influence to this end by urging the GVN to observe the terms of the agreement but also by giving it confidence through assurances of continued U.S. interest and support. We note that Thieu's current thrust is to seize the political initiative by mobilizing the political forces of the country for an early election while keeping the communist military forces at bay. We cannot argue with this objective although the means employed may not be the ones we would choose in every case.

A major GVN liability is its poor image in the eyes of the American Congress and public. We and the GVN must contrive to seek improvements on this score and the forthcoming visit of President Thieu offers a major opportunity on this score, as well as for a demonstration of U.S. support.

It may at some point be useful for the GVN (1) to issue a strong factual statement of the situation and (2) follow it up with vigorous diplomatic initiatives along the lines of those considered later in this paper for the United States.

B. Congress

Meanwhile, we are beginning to approach with Congress the closely related question of post-war aid to Indochina. It is, of course, essential that we gain Congressional support for continued large-scale assistance to South Viet-Nam

and acceptance of the desirability of aid to North Viet-Nam. It may, moreover, be necessary to prepare Congressional and public opinion for other courses of action.

C. DRV

Our continuing diplomatic contacts with the DRV offer the prime channel to communicate our views to the Hanoi politbureau. We may now wish to use them to convey (1) a strong expression of our concern over the course of developments in South Viet-Nam and demand a halt in the military build-up. We could escalate to (2) an explicit warning that we will be forced to take retaliatory steps unless there is evidence of improvement within a given time period, e.g. a halt to the infiltration of men and supplies, dismantling of the SAMS at Khe San, return of DRV personnel to FPJMC team sites, an end of enemy initiated military activities, rapid withdrawal from Laos, etc.

D. ICCS NATIONS

We are already making demarches to the Hungarians and Poles here in Washington, for urging them to use their influence with Hanoi to bring about better DRV/PRG compliance with the Paris Agreement. Ambassador Porter is going to Ottawa to discuss the situation with the Canadians and seek to persuade them to remain in the ICCS.

We may wish (1) also to have a thorough review of the situation with the Indonesians. We would ask them to do what they can with the DRV/PRG through their delegation on the ICCS and their ambassador in Hanoi, but given their

limited leverage our main purpose would be to keep them informed and give them the satisfaction of having been consulted.

E. USSR and PRC

Neither the Soviet Union or the PRC has admitted to interest in actually limiting war supplies to Hanoi, but both continue to display sensitivity to the effect of Viet-Nam on their relations with the United States. An approach to them could be (1) in essentially the same terms as our representations to the Hungarians and Poles with somewhat more emphasis on their responsibilities as major powers. Alternatively, the approach might include (2) a strong protest against arms supplies to Hanoi and (3) a call for an embargo on further arms to both sides in Viet-Nam. Additional pressure might be brought to bear by (4) making our representations public.

F. The International Conference

A report from one or more members of the ICCS could form the formal basis (if one were needed) for a move to reconvene the International Conference on Viet-Nam. Should (1) the DRV refuse to join us in the call, we could (2) quietly round up the necessary six votes (with France possibly in the swing position) and/or (3) publicly make known our view that the Conference should be reconvened.

G. The UN

It seems unlikely that recourse to either (1) the

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Security Council or (2) the Secretary General would be useful under present circumstances.

H. Allies

Aside from the desirability of (1) keeping our allies (notably the TCCs, NATO, Japan) informed of our views and concerns, it would appear feasible to request (2) their active and concerted intercession with the DRV, the USSR and the PRC in the general interests of world peace.

EA/VN:LBAskew 3/7/73

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